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SCIENCE

FRIDAY, MAY 20, 1910

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THE GROUP AS A STIMULUS TO MENTAL ACTIVITY¹

THE purpose of this paper is not to present the results of an original investigation, but merely to suggest a problem. Efficiency in brain activity and in correlated mental activity depends upon many conditions. Among these are physiological age, race, sex, the blood supply to the brain, as determined by general nutrition, exercise, posture, and the size of the cerebral arteries; the quality of the blood as determined by food, drugs, the supply of oxygen, nasal respiration, etc.; again by a group of conditions which make up the environment, the temperature, humidity, barometric pressure, light, peripheral stimulation, etc. Again as the social instincts in man are fundamental, one of the most important factors in his environment is the presence or absence of other human beings. This can not be ignored. The problem I wish to present is this: What is the effect on mental activity of the presence of a group of other persons, if studied objectively like the effects of temperature, barometric pressure, or the like? Perhaps the best way to present this problem is to recount briefly the meager but important results of investigations already made.²

Studies in social psychology have shown that an individual alone and the same individual in a group are two different psychological beings. Recent investigations show that the same is true of children. The

¹ Read before Section L, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Boston, December, 1909.

² For reference to the studies mentioned below see *Ped. Sem.*, Vol. XII., June, 1905, pp. 229-230.